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ABSTRACT

Competency based instruction (CBI) can be used either for preservice or inservice purposes. The impact of CBI on students is to (1) enable them to systematically determine their personal learning needs; (2) increase responsibility for their own learning and enhance autonomy and sense of personal direction; (3) provide feedback; and (4) assure a better match between student capabilities and the needs of a current or potential job. CBI programs should be developed by a cross-sectional approach to specify valid competencies, and the program should assume responsibility for providing experiences through which students can gain specified competencies. Professors in CBI programs need to develop a repertoire of approaches to teaching and learning and see themselves as instruments for learning. (MLF)

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THE CASE FOR COMPETENCY BASED INSTRUCTION IN THE
PREPARATION AND RENEWAL OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF PROFESSORS OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION
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By

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When the request came to make this presentation at this General Session, I responded that it came at the very best and at the very worst of times. The very best of times because since 1972 at the University of Vermont, we have been utilizing a competency based approach (CBA) in our Administration and Planning program, and this year we have been engaged in an assessment of how well it has worked. This opportunity thus pushed me further than I might have gone in thinking about what we have been doing these few years and where we want to go. It came at the very worst of times because I was already committed previously to complete several other long postponed tasks. What has emerged is the result of a jumbled mass of notes made at various times on yellow note pads, the back of tattered envelopes, and on corners of crumpled tissue paper. So, if you get bored with the output from this less than systematic process, perhaps you will find it interesting to speculate as to which input was written on what paper.

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As I began to prepare my remarks, one of my first resources was the CCBC Notebook and other materials authored or edited by Lloyd McCleary, who is certainly one of our leading contemporary developers and theorists on competency based instruction. In a January 1973 paper, which has received too little circulation, Lloyd pointed out that the

competency movement "... does not represent a drastic departure from past lines of developmental work -- it has sound conceptual and experiential roots".¹ This comment has always intrigued me, yet I have never taken the time to follow it up. This time I did and I tracked down a 1988 cutting edge publication by Orin Graff and Calvin Street called Improving Competence in Educational Administration. If you have not read it, I highly recommend that you do. On completing the text, I could not help but think how ironic it is that a major portion of this year's NCPEA is devoted to the very topic which was then treated so thoroughly by authors from this institution and from what was then called Memphis State College. In fact, in their introduction they commented on NCPEA's concern for understanding and developing competence.² I wish they were with us to share their story of attempting to use the competency approach at the University of Tennessee twenty years ago. What could we learn from them? Getting back to this literature illustrated once again that there is very little that is new in education -- we often return to ideas which were generated years ago and treat them with some new emphasis. I was certainly humbled by this long overdue "discovery", yet stimulated by the thought that what my colleagues and I have been doing these past few years is to develop further ideas which have a strong historical base.

At the outset let me say that my willingness to take the positive view of competency based instruction (CBI) is grounded in how I define it and the term "personalize". The two are not always mutually supportive. Much of the ferment in our field over competency based education (CBE) is stirred by some disparate definitions which are rooted

either in the stimulus - response school of the behaviorists or gestalt - field theory or third - force psychology. I see CBI as a very compatible but fellow with personalized or humanistic education. The competency approach need not be at the purely didactic level, but can indeed have a heuristic and, what Broudy calls, a philetic focus (the latter emphasizing the emotional aspects of student growth or what is often referred to as the affective domain).³

As I see it, personalize and humanize are interchangeable terms although the latter has become more refined in the literature. Probably the latter has become more of a jargon term than the former but if the products of this NCPEA are widely enough disseminated, then we will probably see the addition of "personalized" to our educational lexicon. Schmieder, one of the most prolific writers on competency based teacher education, defines personalized instruction as follows:

"Instruction which is designed to meet specific needs of learners. Education is personalized when assessment, objectives, strategies, and evaluation are planned with the learners and tailored to the learners individual needs, level, rate, value, and choices."⁴

The most complete definition of "humanized" or "humanistic" which I have found and to which I am committed is provided by Schmuck and Schmuck.

"Humanized schools, as we see them, are those where the environment sets the stage for successful personal encounters; where ideas, facts, and feelings are openly expressed; where conflict is brought out into the open, discussed, and worked on: where emotions share equal prominence with the intellect and where learning activities integrate the personal interests of students and the learning goals of the school."⁵

Note that these authors carry the concept far beyond the goal of "meeting the specific needs of learners". Here we find these needs attended to but buttressed by the significant additions of personal

encounter, conflict, and emotion, all of which are melded with the goals of the organization. This last dimension serves to place considerable responsibility on us as professors to insure that our organizations do not become unbending and arbitrary in their relationships with students. Institutional requirements are not sacred variables - they should be subject to modification and manipulation.

As far as competency based instruction is concerned, there is a considerable range of definitions bandied about. Perhaps one reason for this disagreement is that the approach has been stressed in our field only since the early 70's (forgetting the earlier work of Graff and Street). I think it significant that a Phi Delta Kappan article in 1972 on "New Developments in the Preparation of Educational Leaders", did not mention CBE.⁶ Demonstration of the wide spread of views as to what competency based is, is shown in a study conducted by Metzger and Demeke. They found, in examining past and present views of CE administrative preparation, that the definitions ranged from "Competency is a degree of quality behavior", to "Competencies are the smallest units of behavior that, if employed at quality level, will make a difference in fulfillment of responsibility".⁷ In the field of teacher education, the CBA is often defined "... as one which specifies objectives in explicit form and holds prospective teachers accountable for meeting them. Teacher competencies and measures for evaluating them are specified and made known in advance of instruction".⁸

In arriving at my definitions, I had to clarify the sometimes vague and confusing usage of competence and competency. My intent is not to engage in academic nitpicking over the terms but I see an important distinction. Competence is "the minimum knowledge, skills, values, and/or

attitudes a person can be certified to possess based on a set of criteria or level of expectation".⁹

"Competence can be measured only through an accumulation of evidence, over time, that an individual is able to apply knowledge and perform certain functions or skills in ways which are, more often than not, perceived positively by both the individual and his audiences. A person is not competent because of what he knows, does, or feels; he is competent when what he knows, does, or feels is evaluated as being positive in its results and is part of his consistent behavior as a human being."¹⁰

This, then, is the more long range, futures conception of the term.

Competency, on the other hand, is more singular, more immediate, and more focused in its application. It is the achievement of the knowledge, skills, values, and/or attitudes necessary to perform satisfactorily a particular task. (italics mine).¹¹

The idea of competency is intimately involved with the ideas of participation, authority, responsibility, and community. The word competency refers to skills and abilities. Its Latin root is competere, to strive together from which modern usage also gets the word compete. The meaning of competency is bound up in the notion of being properly or well qualified. A properly qualified person is one who, for a specific set of activities, is deemed by his peers to possess those skills and abilities appropriate to the function of role.¹²

These definitions, then, are consistent with my view of personalized or humanistic education and my beliefs about the nature of man.

I see man as a free, unique creature, capable of attaining a self direction and a creative productivity that stem from his whole person. His freedom implies responsibility and enables him to choose. He is capable, at best, of interdependence and of being an agent of constructive social change.¹³

Given all of the above, what then are some of the positive aspects of utilizing CBI for administrator preservice and inservice education? How can the competency approach "personalize the administrator"? As I have pondered these questions, what emerged were the two focal areas of "impact on professors and programs" and "impact on students". This array

of positive dimensions is not purported to be "pure" in that there is certainly linkage between items on each list - items which, incidentally, are not rank ordered. I would add the caveat that the emphasis of what follows is on processes and practices for program development. The great question of "What knowledge is of most worth?" is skirted.

Impact on Professors and Programs

1. If the competency approach is to be used successfully, programs must be developed in the most precise definition of the term. A program is a set of goals, objectives, and activities which interact to form a cluster of related educational experiences.¹⁴ Rather than a program being built mainly on professorial whims and interests, which can result in a conglomerate of relatively unrelated experiences for students, a systematically designed program, spinning off of the competency approach, can be much more rationally and holistically developed. As one researcher has put it, "... when a college as a whole (or large sub-unit of a university) decides to implement a competency program or curricula that leads to a degree, there must be a readiness for a complete rethinking of institutional practice."¹⁵

If competencies are spelled out to a high degree, then the program must assume responsibility for providing the experiences through which students can gain these competencies. Considerable efforts have to be made by a faculty to go through the planning cycle ranging from needs assessment through establishment of goals and objectives and program components to the eventual development of more effective evaluation procedures. Anyone who has been a consistent consumer of the CCBC Notebook since its inception in October 1971, would have to be impressed by

the programmatic efforts made by various institutions around the country utilizing the competency approach. This was a major focus of Graff and Street's work.¹⁶

2. The development of competencies demands a much greater "mind set" and expenditure of energy in order to not only identify initial competencies, but to design a process whereby these competencies are continually updated for "relevance". If competencies are to be relevant, professors must draw on more resources than themselves in order to identify them. A cross sectional approach which relies on input from faculty, students, and the field is essential if valid competencies are to be specified.

Certainly, not all institutions have the resources to go through the procedures of a Project R.O.M.E. which is probably the most extensive and sophisticated attempt which has been made to date to identify administrator competencies.¹⁷ Other projects have also been initiated in the country such as the Interstate 505 activity in New England.¹⁸ Despite being unable to go the R.O.M.E. route, I submit that every institution can do quite a bit to validate competencies within the constraints of its limited resources. Certainly a by-product of this validation process is that of developing more dialogue with the field, an eternal problem for most administration departments. Graff and Street saw this possibility in the CA when they mentioned professors tend to concentrate upon what professors see as needs of students and to subsequently let student needs become secondary.¹⁹ Such contact with the field will certainly be valuable in keeping professors up to date on what life is like for administrators on the firing line. In this regard, if you are not familiar with them, I would highly recommend that in reference to this

"up-dating" you read recent pieces by Harry Wolcott and Jean Hills.²⁰

3. Programs are forced by the competency approach to develop alternative methodologies for facilitating student learning. While the course approach is still appropriate, other means of instruction are demanded in order to provide alternative routes for learning. Consequently, what we have seen is that time is viewed as a variable and not a constant under the competency approach, with the result that methodologies ranging from scenarios to simulations are being rediscovered or developed all around the country.²¹ This is an extremely positive and significant turn of events in higher education as professors are going to have to change their styles of teaching if they rely primarily on the time honored lecture mode.²²

4. How do adults learn? Are there characteristics of adults as learners which are different from those of children and youth? One of the most stimulating aspects of preparing this paper was getting into some of the literature on adult education. For many years, intuition has told me that adults differ from young people in terms of how they learn. As Knowles points out, we need a new theory of andragogy which is the art and science of helping adults learn as compared to the traditional reliance on pedagogy which is the art and science of teaching children.²³ Let me give some examples of what he means. As we mature, we normally move toward being more self directed persons. Adults want to make their own decisions, face consequences, and manage their own lives.²⁴ To a child an experience is usually something that happens to him -- it is an external event, not an integral part of him. "To an adult, however, an experience is him. An adult is what he has done."²⁵ Children tend to view education with a

perspective of postponed application. Education is usually accumulated in a subject matter fashion. Adults tend to have a perspective of immediacy of application. Education is viewed from a problem centered stance.²⁶

Grappling with these questions and concepts can be one of the most beneficial aspects of the CA. It demands attention to individual learning style. As an aside, I would make the observation that it appears that developers of competency based administrator preparation programs have been at least aware intuitively of some of the above points. Although I have yet to see any reference in educational administration related literature to this body of knowledge, administrative programs have resisted the route of spelling out endless lists of minute competencies which are handed to a student to eventually "perform". We seem to know that such an approach would be less than a success with the people who are our clientele.

5. What are our assumptions about learning? This item relates to the above, but gets into more detail in terms of teaching methodologies. What model(s) of teaching do we select as the most appropriate one to facilitate the kind of learning climate which we feel is most appropriate for our students? A model ...is a pattern or plan, which can be used to shape a curriculum or course, to select instructional materials, and to guide a teacher's action.²⁷ As professors, we need to develop our repertoire of approaches to teaching and learning, for, as Joyce and Weil state, there is little evidence to date which would indicate that there is a single most reliable teaching strategy to be used with all students.²⁸ This is not to say that we simply select various methods on a hit or miss basis without pinpointing the ones we want on the basis of a sound philosophy of education. Certainly some approaches to teaching and learning

might be incompatible with our operating philosophy. We need a consistent philosophy to help us work effectively with students in a truly helping way.²⁹

6. The CBA, if it is grounded in the kind of personal philosophy described previously in the introduction to this paper, can enable a professor to engage in a truly helping relationship with his students. We will begin to see ourselves as instruments for learning rather than relying primarily on the "right method". We will begin to recognize that the behavior of ourselves and of our students is primarily a function of the perceptions we hold at a certain moment in time, and that what is significant is not whether these perceptions are right or wrong, but that they are reality for us at that juncture of activity.³⁰ To me, this dimension of the competency movement is one of the most potentially significant in terms of our attempts to "personalize the administrator" and, in turn, the professor.

7. The CA has great potential to further the use of an R. & D. methodology in our field. The systematic process which could be used in developing a competency based program is ready made for carrying the earlier work of people such as Graff and Street much further in its refinement. There is considerable challenge ahead in finding ways to integrate more effectively the R. & D. methodology with the theory based movement.³¹

8. The competency approach provokes innumerable questions even if we don't have the answers. To me this has been one of the most important by-products of our attempts to utilize it at the University of Vermont. A few of the questions we are confronting are:

(1) Should we provide alternative routes to CBI for students who have

little field experience or who are not ready to assume considerable responsibility for their own learning?; (2) How much structure should we provide and what are the minimum competencies we can expect a student to gain from his program?; (3) What are valid indicators of competence?; (4) Can or should all learnings be linked with competence per se? Might we emphasize competence to the detriment of what a person is?; (5) Is it possible that there are outcomes from using the CA that are as valuable as the competencies themselves?; (6) Is all our effort making any difference on the operation of schools which hire our graduates?

Impact on Students

1. When students enter a program under a competency approach, they know much more clearly what a program has to offer them and can more systematically determine their personal learning needs. A validated competency list can be extremely helpful as a guidance mechanism for selecting learning experiences. The "ambiguity" which so often surrounds some programs as far as what specific learnings a person can get from them and the bases for subsequent evaluation, is removed to a considerable degree with the use of CBI.

Rather than finding himself fitting into a rigid, pre-determined program, a student knows that he can have much more impact on the design of his own program than he could under a traditional one. For example, I remember quite clearly the general M.Ed. in administration which was offered in the University of Vermont when I came there in 1968. A list of ten courses was handed to the student and that was the program. There is much more freedom of choice under this approach where a student can

define many of his objectives, determine how to achieve them, and relate these objectives to his personal needs. Such freedom of action is in keeping with one of the major characteristics of what Argyris and Schon refer to as a Model II theory-in-use of professional development, which they see as increasing student growth, learning, and effectiveness.³²

2. With freedom of choice comes responsibility. Responsibility is central to a personalized or humanistic view of education.³³ One of the major impacts which a CA can have is to increase responsibility for one's learning and to enhance one's autonomy and sense of personal direction. This feature of choice is a key building block to competency based instruction.

If a program has as an integral component the possibilities of setting personal goals and choosing alternative learning modes, it will be very much in keeping with the thrust of the "futures" literature of recent years. This material points out that our culture and society are changing so rapidly that we can no longer assume that what we learn in our youth will remain valid for the rest of our lives.³⁴ "Whatever competence means today, we can be sure its meaning will have changed by tomorrow. The foundation for future professional competence seems to be the capacity to learn how to learn."³⁵ We must truly learn to invent our own futures,³⁶ and to engage in more effective long range planning.³⁷ To me there are significant implications in this assumption of responsibility for the education of more proactive rather than reactive administrators.

3. Feedback is recognized increasingly as a critical dimension of the educational process. Research over the past two decades substantiates this observation.³⁸ To become competent one must be able to reflect on his actions in order to learn from them.³⁹ Reflection demands data which

usually comes from feedback. A central characteristic of feedback is specificity which also is a central characteristic of CBI. Therefore, under this mode of instruction, student learning has a much greater chance of being enhanced than it does under more traditional educational models.

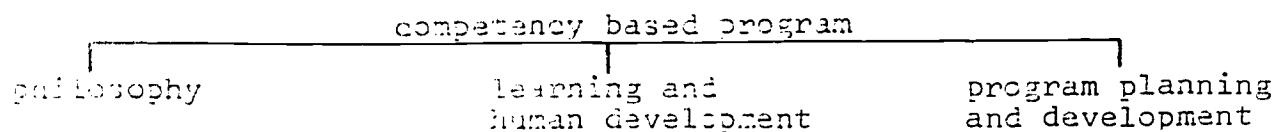
4. Students can utilize the competency approach either for preservice or inservice purposes.⁴⁰ There is no need to reiterate the necessity for more attention being given to continuing education, or staff development if you will. The literature is replete with references to this subject and the need is becoming more acute as we face the realization of less turnover of personnel due to the employment situation.

5. Because of the more explicit articulation of competencies and because a competency program is more situation-specific in its orientation,⁴¹ a student can be assured of a better match between his capabilities and the needs of a current or potential job. I am continually distressed by the gross mismatches which I observe in the hiring process. As a person grows and develops and moves in and out of a variety of social settings, he learns the requirements of those settings and what is demanded for continuing success in them.⁴² In turn, as organizations change, they too need a more accurate reading on the kind of person they wish to hire. It would appear that the use of the competency concept could help immeasurably to improve the "fit" between the individual and the organization.

Conclusion

In this paper I have outlined what I see as some of the major positive aspects of competency based instruction. Conceptually, the material could be portrayed as falling into three broad components which interface to provide a foundation for CB program development. I have spoken to my operating philosophy, my beliefs about learning and human

development, and my ideas about program planning.



A great challenge for any of us who are interested in CBI is to research and test further the "mix" of these components as we search for ways to improve the education of our students. The impediments are formidable - it will be very easy to sit back and say it is impossible to act. Academic arguments can go on and on over the difficulty of proving that achieved competence makes a difference on job performance or that identified competencies are not necessarily valid, etc. There is a strong norm in our institutions not to act until every question can be answered in the most precise way. I submit that if we are serious about improving our programs and truly attempting to personalize the preparation or renewal of administrators, the competency based approach can be used to achieve some of these goals. It will take hard work and seldom will we be able to stand before our peers and answer, in a definitive way, all their tough questions.

In the face of these questions, do we choose a preventive stance, where our main activity is to render obsolete a forecast about our future program needs, do we choose an adaptive stance where our major energy is expended to enable us to adapt to what confronts us now, or do we assume an inventive stance which enables us to invent our own futures in order to meet what we know are the demands of an emerging social system?⁴³ In August 1973, James March kicked off NCPEA with a Cocking Lecture on skills needed by educational administrators of the future. In that lecture he stated that one of the persistent difficulties in reforming administrative training programs is our tendency as

professors to fail to come to grips with the realities of managerial life.⁴⁴ The ineffectiveness of professional schools in increasing the competence of their graduates is the difference between academic education and the realities of practice. There is often a high degree of inconsistency between what we actually do in the real world and what we espouse as a desired theory of action.⁴⁵

How valid are these observations? How would your program respond to them? Ten years after the writing of Graff and Street, NCPEA sponsored a committee to consider the future of educational administration. The work of this committee resulted in a book called Educational Futurism 1985: Challenges for Schools and their Administrators. I conclude this presentation with one of the questions raised in that text.

"What must a given institution do to make its program in educational administration survive and be relevant in 1985?"⁴⁶

Notes

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An Applications to Related Fields," Department of Educational Admin-
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1970), p. 1.
2. Orin B. Graff and Calvin M. Street, Improving Competence in Edu-
cational Administration (New York: Harper & Bros., 1955), p. xxii.
3. Harry S. Broody, The Real World of the Public Schools (New York:
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4. Allen Schmieder, Competency Based Education: The State of the
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14 Glenn L. Immegart and Francis J. Pilecki, An Introduction to Systems for the Educational Administrator (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1973), p. 163.

15 Trivett, p. 20.

16 Graff and Street.

17 Georgia State Department of Education and College of Education, University of Georgia, Results Oriented Management in Education - Project R.O.M.E., Final Reports, Vols. I, II, III (Athens, Georgia: College of Education, University of Georgia, 1975).

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20 Harry Wolcott, The Man In the Principals Office: An Ethnography (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973; Jean Hills, "The Preparation of Administrators: Some Observations from the Firing Line, Educational Administration Quarterly, xi, No. 3 (Autumn, 1975), 1-20; Jean Hills, "Preparation for the Principalship: Some Recommendations from the Field," Administrator's Notebook, xxiii, No. 9 (1975).

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22 Lloyd E. McCleary, "Observations on Competency Based Curriculum Programs, CCBC Notebook, 2, No. 4 (July, 1973), 2; letter from McCleary, June 13, 1976 (personal file); Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, Theory in Practice: Improving Professional Effectiveness (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974) p. 157.

23 Knowles, pp. 37-38.

24 Ibid., p. 40.

25 Ibid., p. 44.

26 Ibid., p. 48.

27 Bruce Joyce and Marsha Weil, Models of Teaching (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972)p. 3.

28 Ibid., p. 4.

29 Arthur W. Combs, Donald L. Avila, and William W. Purkey, Helping Relationships: Basic Concepts for the Helping Professions (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), p. 8. This entire text is a "foundation" in terms of the treatment of the helping relationship.

30 Ibid., pp. 1-60.

31 Lloyd E. McCleary, "The Theory Based Movement: Inhibitor to Development?", CCBC Notebook, 5, No. 2 (February, 1976), 2-3; letter from McCleary, June 13, 1976 (personal file); David R. Byrne, "Toward Clarification of the Competency Based, Theory Based Issue," CCBC Notebook 5, No. 3 (May, 1976), 2-5.

32 Argyris and Schön, pp. 85-95. This text introduces the reader to some very unique and useful concepts and ideas regarding the education of professional personnel for any organization. There is considerable reference to competence and methodology for adult education, which melds the text quite nicely with Knowles' work on andragogy.

33 Nash, p. 12.

34 Knowles, p. 37.

35 Argyris and Schön, p. 157.

36 Ziegler, p. 2.

37 For an insightful and thought provoking treatment of how individuals and organizations need to change toward long range planning see Donald H. Michael, On Learning to Plan and Planning to Learn (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1973).

38 Leland P. Bradford, "The Teaching-Learning Transaction," The Planning of Change, ed. Warren G. Bennis, Kenneth D. Benne, and Robert Chin (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1961), p. 499; Knowles, pp. 42-43; Argyris and Schön, p. 86.

39 Argyris and Schön, p. 4.

40 The only publications in our field which I have seen that stress preservice and inservice education, are the 1972 and 1975 NASSP monographs listed in footnotes 10 and 21. There is some evidence to indicate that CBE is being utilized increasingly for inservice purposes, however. See James E. Hertling, "Competency Based Education: Is It Applicable To Adult Education Programs?," Adult Leadership, 23, No. 2 (June, 1974), 50-52.

41 Kelley, et al, p. 10.

42 Howard S. Becker, "Personal Change in Adult Life," The Planning of Change, ed. Bennis, Benne, and Chin (2nd ed., 1969), pp. 259-263.

43 Warren L. Ziegler, "The Potential of Educational Futures," The Potential of Educational Futures, ed. Michael Marian and Warren L. Ziegler (Worthington, Ohio: Charles A. Jones, 1972), pp. 5-6.

44 James G. March, "Analytical Skills and the University Training of Educational Administrators," The Journal of Educational Administration XII, No. 1 (May, 1974), 17-44.

14. Argyris and Schön, p. 157 and p. 7.

15. Walter G. Hack, et al. Educational Futurism 1985: Challenges for
Schools and Their Administrators (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1971) p. 3.

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